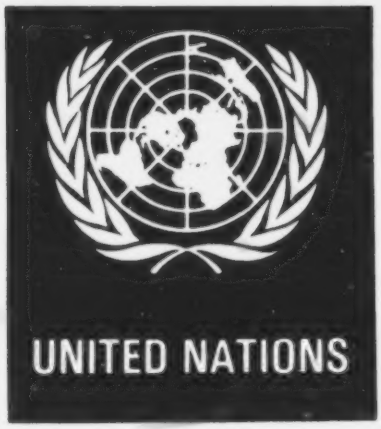

DIVISION FOR
PALESTINIAN RIGHTS

The United Nations and non-governmental organization activities on the question of Palestine

(Information note)

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Introduction

The contribution of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to the shaping of the world after the cold war has been increasingly acknowledged by Governments and international organizations alike. Today, many sectors and organizations of the United Nations prize the experience, expertise and innovative thinking of NGOs and seek to involve them in their activities in a variety of ways.

In his statement to the annual DPI/NGO Conference in September 1994, the United Nations Secretary-General emphasized that NGOs have an important role to play in the maintenance and establishment of peace and called on them to engage in assistance, mobilization and democratization activities, as a complement to those of the United Nations. By preserving their independence and promoting democratic processes, NGOs constituted the link between democracy and peace. The Secretary-General stressed that NGOs were considered full participants in international life and were a basic form of popular representation in the present world. Their participation in international organizations was a guarantee of the political legitimacy of those organizations.

NGO cooperation with the United Nations on the question of Palestine goes back to the inception of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, established as a subsidiary body of the General Assembly in 1975. The Committee's mandate was to make recommendations for a solution of the question of Palestine based on the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. The following year, the Assembly requested the Committee to promote the greatest possible dissemination of information on its recommendations through NGOs. Since then, the Committee has increasingly cooperated with the NGO community worldwide. The Committee has stressed on several occasions that NGOs have played a significant and constructive role in solidarity with the Palestinian national struggle and in support of the Committee's work.

Since the signing of the Declaration of Principles by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in September 1993, the United Nations, including the General Assembly, as well as the Palestinian Rights' Committee, have endeavoured to make a concrete contribution to the full implementation of the agreements reached between the parties. While welcoming the Declaration and subsequent developments, the international community is aware that this is the beginning of a difficult transition process that has many pitfalls and which necessitates continued international support and attention if it is to succeed. Many sensitive aspects relating to the implementation of the Declaration such as Israeli withdrawal, Palestinian elections, permanent status arrangements regarding Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security arrangements, borders and other issues affecting the entire region and beyond remain to be negotiated. Moreover, the serious deterioration of the socio-economic situation in the occupied Palestinian territories requires the urgent provision of international assistance. The United Nations, and the Palestinians themselves, have recognized that the role of NGOs - both those already active on the ground and solidarity groups in their respective countries - is of particular importance in these international efforts.

In his message to the North American NGO Symposium in 1994, Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Palestinian Authority and Chairman of the PLO Executive Committee, stressed that the efforts by NGOs to promote the peace process had made an outstanding contribution to creating the appropriate circumstances and preparing the climate for the signing of the Declaration of Principles and the

subsequent Gaza-Jericho agreement. The Palestinian people was now looking to the NGOs to make yet greater efforts and to undertake yet more activities in its support as it proceeded to build its national and economic institutions and the infrastructure destroyed in long years of occupation.

General Assembly resolution 49/62 A, adopted on 14 December 1994, has reaffirmed that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until the question is resolved in all its aspects in a satisfactory manner in accordance with international legitimacy. In the same resolution, the Assembly has recognized that the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People can make a valuable contribution to international efforts to promote the effective implementation of the Declaration of Principles and to mobilize international support and assistance to the Palestinian people during the transitional period. The Assembly has also requested the Committee to continue to exert all efforts to promote the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. The Committee was asked to cooperate with NGOs in pursuit of these objectives, and to involve additional NGOs in its work.

In accordance with this mandate, the Committee has continued to cooperate with NGOs active on the question of Palestine and to take steps to strengthen the NGO network built up over the years and to make it ever more responsive and useful to the needs of the Palestinian people during the transitional period. The Committee has relied on its programme of regional NGO symposia and international meetings of NGOs in order to encourage consideration and debate of the most important issues that need to be addressed and to stimulate necessary action by the NGO community. Detailed information about the network developed by the Committee and the meetings it organizes is given below.

Additionally, several United Nations organs, programmes and agencies, in particular those working in the West Bank and Gaza, have established close contacts with NGOs active in the territories, that have long-standing experience in providing development assistance to Palestinians and have played an important role in supporting the growth of Palestinian institutions.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has programmes in the areas of primary and preparatory education, vocational and teacher training, primary health care, relief and social services, environmental infrastructural development and income generation. The UNRWA-NGO partnership dates back to the establishment of the Agency in 1950. NGOs have complemented UNRWA's education, health, relief and social services to refugees by pioneering work in assisting people with disabilities and launching community self-help and income-generation programmes. They have given financial aid, assistance in elementary schooling, staff training and maternal and child health care and have distributed food and medical supplies. They run pilot projects in new domains and in emergency situations. For its part, UNRWA helps NGOs by giving direct financial aid or by sharing expertise, technology and information and information and through joint training workshops. The Agency also participates with NGOs in seminars and planning, assists with their fund-raising campaigns and supports the development of community organizations.

The activities of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) concentrate on provision and improvement of basic infrastructure, enhancing Palestinian capacity in the areas of governance and public administration, strengthening the economic base of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, particularly in agriculture, industry and trade, and information exchange among donor

Governments and international organizations. In implementing its programme, the coordination with NGOs is essential. UNDP activities are decided jointly with the Palestinian Authority, but in many instances they are implemented by NGOs or in close cooperation with them, for they are often the only actors on the ground.

The programmes of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) focus on strengthening community-level structures, particularly among disadvantaged groups in areas such as primary health care, basic education, physiotherapy and psychological trauma. The implementation of these programmes is coordinated with those NGOs whose activities are aimed at similar target groups.

In 1994, the Secretary-General of the United Nations appointed a Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories who serves as a focal point for all United Nations economic, social and other assistance to the Palestinians in the occupied territories. He facilitates coordination among the respective United Nations programmes and agencies that are operating in the territories, so as to ensure an integrated and unified approach towards economic and social development. In this connection the Special Coordinator maintains constant contact with the United Nations programmes and agencies, as well as NGOs and the donor community in general.

I. THE NETWORK OF NGOS ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

Through the years, a network of more than 1,000 NGOs active on the question of Palestine has been developed. National and international NGOs, political and humanitarian organizations, NGOs promoting human rights or economic and social development, solidarity-, charitable- or action-oriented groups, trade unions and professional associations, organizations with special focus on women, children, refugees and detainees are part of this network.

Organizations from all continents cooperate with the Palestinian Rights' Committee with the aim of relieving the hardships of the Palestinian people and supporting its struggle to attain its legitimate rights. NGOs in North America, Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America have formed regional coordinating committees to improve networking among themselves and to liaise better with the Committee and its secretariat. An International Coordinating Committee of NGOs on the Question of Palestine liaises with the regional committees, as well as with individual NGOs, especially in the Middle East region.

To join this network of NGOs on the question of Palestine, the organizations undergo an accreditation process with the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. In view of the new developments in the peace process and after consultations with the NGO coordinating committees, new accreditation guidelines were adopted in 1994, in order to broaden the spectrum of participating NGOs and to encourage others, in particular those working on economic and social issues to join. These guidelines are:

"The NGO should:

"(a) Be a recognized local, national or international non-profit organization;

"(b) Support the Charter of the United Nations, the principles of international law and the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily its right to self-determination;

"(c) Have demonstrated that it has concrete programmes or the serious intent to establish such programmes in support of the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

"Organizations whose mandates preclude advocacy but whose work encompasses humanitarian ends and programmes, including development, benefiting the Palestinian people, are welcome to participate."

Interested NGOs are requested to submit an application form (see annex 1) to the Division for Palestinian Rights of the United Nations Secretariat, which, in consultation with the relevant regional or international coordinating committee, will forward it for consideration by the Palestinian Rights' Committee. Once the NGO is accredited, it will be invited to participate and have voting rights in the NGO symposia and meetings on the question of Palestine held under the auspices of the Palestinian Rights' Committee; may elect and be elected in the regional and international coordinating committees; and will be, in general, part of the network receiving all the relevant information with regard to the United Nations efforts to resolve the question of Palestine. Organizations that, for one reason or another, feel they cannot subscribe to the accreditation criteria but are interested in the issue, can request to be placed on the mailing list and to attend meetings as observers.

II. REGIONAL SYMPOSIA AND INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS FOR NGOS ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

The involvement of NGOs in the work of the Palestinian Rights' Committee increased rapidly from the early 1980s in the course of the preparatory work for the convening of the International Conference on the Question of Palestine. More than 100 NGOs were represented as observers at that Conference, held at Geneva in August/September 1983. Since then, NGOs have played an increasing role in heightening awareness of and support for Palestinian rights and in working to improve the situation of Palestinians living under occupation. Professional and popular associations undertook exchanges and other programmes of joint action with their Palestinian counterparts. Women's organizations investigated the condition of Palestinian women and children in the occupied territory; jurists' organizations established special investigative commissions to determine the violations of human rights and to disseminate their findings; and educational, health and development organizations established a network of concrete support for Palestinians in the occupied territories.

Since 1983, following the recommendations of the International Conference, which were endorsed by the General Assembly, the Division for Palestinian Rights has been mandated to increase its contacts with NGOs and to convene symposia and meetings for NGOs. Since 1984, 28 regional symposia and 11 international meetings have taken place. NGO symposia are held annually in Europe and North America and periodically in other regions. International meetings are held annually at either Geneva or Vienna. Since 1993, the following symposia and international meetings were held:

- Tenth United Nations North American NGO Symposium, held in New York in June 1993, on the theme "Building for peace in Palestine: priorities for the second decade of the NGO movement";

- Seventh United Nations European NGO Symposium, held at Vienna in August 1993, on the theme "The Middle East peace process: Palestinian rights and development - a challenge to Europe";

- Tenth United Nations International NGO Meeting, also held at Vienna in August 1993, on the theme "Renewing the United Nations-NGO commitment to Palestinian national and human rights";

- Fourth United Nations African NGO Symposium, held at Dakar in September 1993, in conjunction with the African Seminar on the theme "Africa, the Middle East and the question of Palestine;

- Eleventh United Nations North American NGO Symposium, held in Toronto in July 1994, on the theme: "Palestine: towards a just and lasting peace";

- Joint United Nations International NGO Meeting and European Symposium, held in Geneva in August 1994, on the theme: "Building on the Declaration of Principles towards the independent Palestinian State".

Regional NGO symposia and international meetings bring together numerous organizations active on the question of Palestine, including Palestinian and Israeli NGOs. Panel discussions, usually held in plenary, serve to provide information and analysis on current political developments, to focus on the needs of the Palestinian people and to improve networking among NGOs. Part of the symposia and meetings is devoted to workshops, where NGOs with specialized interests focus on issues like human rights, economic development, health, education, women, children, religion, the media or others. The workshops provide an opportunity for small-group interaction, exchange of experience and expertise and elaboration of common strategies and action proposals. Speakers in panels and workshops are drawn from the academic community, from among parliamentarians, government representatives and the media and from within the NGO community, including Palestinians and Israelis. NGO symposia and meetings may adopt a final document and a set of specific recommendations for action by NGOs. They also elect a coordinating committee to promote regional and international networking and to maintain contacts with the United Nations. The reports of symposia and international meetings are issued as publications of the Division for Palestinian Rights; a summary is included in the annual report of the Committee to the General Assembly.

The groundwork for the regional symposia in North America and Europe and for the international NGO meeting is laid out at preparatory meetings of consultations between the Palestinian Rights' Committee, the NGO coordinating committees and the Division for Palestinian Rights. The meetings serve to coordinate future activities, work out a programme for forthcoming events, identify panelists, workshop facilitators and resource persons and improve the networking among the NGOs themselves.

Under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Division for Palestinian Rights also organizes regional seminars on the question of Palestine. While NGO meetings are geared to mobilizing action at the grass-roots level in support of the Palestinian people, seminars are primarily aimed at encouraging greater governmental support and action and discussing relevant aspects of the current peace process. NGOs are invited as observers to these seminars and are able to intervene in the discussions and to present their views to the participants. In Africa, Asia and Latin America, seminars and NGO symposia are usually combined into one event, allowing the NGOs enough time to discuss their own concerns. These combined meetings have proved most effective in encouraging a lively exchange of views between all the participants, experts, government representatives, academicians and NGO representatives as well. A list of the NGO symposia and meetings is attached in annex II.

III. RELATED ACTIVITIES

Pursuant to a decision by the General Assembly (32/40 B), the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is observed annually on 29 November, the day when, in 1947, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), known as the "Partition resolution", providing for the establishment of a "Jewish State" and an "Arab State" in Palestine. The observance takes place at United Nations Headquarters in New York, at the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna and elsewhere. The observance includes special meetings at which statements are made by high-level personalities, the display of exhibits, film showings and other activities, depending on the location. Over the years, many NGOs have participated in the commemoration of the Day and spokespersons from the NGO community have addressed these meetings. In many countries, United Nations information offices have also assisted NGOs in organizing their own commemoration by supplying posters, documentation and information about the observance.

The Division for Palestinian Rights publishes monthly bulletins on international action on the question of Palestine, which contain a regular section on relevant publications issued by NGOs. The bulletins are mailed to the NGO network on a regular basis, together with other publications of the Division.

The Division for Palestinian Rights is developing a computer-based United Nations information system on the question of Palestine (UNISPAL). Modalities for access by outside users through a bulletin board are being worked out. The system is being designed to store and provide information, current and historical, on the various aspects of the question of Palestine, the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations, and developments in the Israeli-PLO peace process, primarily from United Nations sources. Information on the work of NGOs will also be included.

Further information on the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the NGO network on the question of Palestine, as well as the application for organizations interested in becoming accredited with the Committee can be obtained from the Division for Palestinian Rights. The address is:

United Nations Secretariat
Division for Palestinian Rights

Attn: Ms. Elizabeth Cabal
NGO Liaison Officer
Room S-3362
United Nations
New York, NY 10017
United States of America

Fax: (212) 963-4199

Annex I

APPLICATION FOR ACCREDITATION WITH THE COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

Criteria for accreditation of NGOs

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has established the following criteria for the participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in activities and meetings organized under its aegis.

The NGO should:

a) be a recognized local, national or international non-profit organization;

b) support the United Nations Charter, the principles of international law, and the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily its right to self-determination:

c) have demonstrated that it has concrete programmes or the serious intent to establish such programmes in support of the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

Organizations whose mandates preclude advocacy but whose work encompasses humanitarian ends and programmes, including development, benefiting the Palestinian people, are welcome to participate.

1. Name of your organization:

2. Address: Street City State/Country Zip

3. Telephone number: ( )

4. Telefax Number: ( )

5. Contact person's name: First Last

6. Contact person's title:

7. Principal Officers: Name Title

[1] _____ _____

[2] _____ _____

[3] _____ _____

8. Date of founding:

9. Membership (size, constituency):

10. Official languages:

11. Preferred working languages:

12. Does your organization adhere to the criteria outlined on page one? ☐ Yes ☐ No

13. Are you affiliated with any national or international non-governmental organizations or any of the coordinating committees of NGOs on the question of Palestine? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Name of the organization/coordinating committees to which you are affiliated: _____

14. Are you accredited or do you maintain contact with an international organization, a United Nations agency or body other than the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the Division for Palestinian Rights? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Please specify: _____

15. Have you attended any of the United Nations regional symposia or international NGO meetings on the question of Palestine? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Please specify: _____

16. Area of activity/interest of your organization (please check one or more):

☐ Arts	☐ Human Rights	☐ Refugees
☐ Agriculture	☐ Industry	☐ Relief
☐ Assistance	☐ Information/Media	☐ Research/Analysis
☐ Children/Youth	☐ International Law	☐ Social Services
☐ Culture	☐ Labour/Union Rights	☐ Trade
☐ Development	☐ Law	☐ Women
☐ Education	☐ Lobbying	☐ Other (please specify)
☐ Environment/Water	☐ Mental Health	_____
☐ General Solidarity	☐ Peace	_____
☐ Health/Medical	☐ Publications	_____

17. Description of your organization and its objectives

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

18. Description of the current activities and programs of your organization

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

19. Scope of your organization:

- ☐ local (please specify) _____
- ☐ national (please specify) _____
- ☐ international (please specify in which countries) _____

_____

20. Which type of publications, if any, does your organization issue, and with what frequency?

_____

21. Title of your publication: _____

_____

22. Comments or requests

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Annex II

List of regional symposia and international meetings of non-governmental organizations on the question of Palestine held since June 1984

North American regional symposia

(First) North American Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine (New York, 25-27 June 1984)

(Second) North American Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine (New York, 10-12 July 1985)

(Third) North American Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine (New York, 11-13 June 1986)

(Fourth) North American Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine (New York, 24-26 June 1987)

(Fifth) North American Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine (New York, 29 June-1 July 1988)

(Sixth) North American Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine (New York, 21-23 June 1989)

(Seventh) North American Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine (New York, 27-29 June 1990)

(Eighth) North American Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine (Montreal, 28-30 June 1991)

(Ninth) North American Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine (New York, 24-26 June 1992)

(Tenth) North American Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine (New York, 30 June-2 July 1993)

(Eleventh) North American Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine (Toronto, 6-8 July 1994)

Asian regional symposia

(First) Asian Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(New Delhi, 1-3 May 1985)

(Second) Asian Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(New Delhi, 8-10 June 1987) (combined with the Fourth Asian Regional Seminar on the Question of Palestine)

(Third) Asian Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(Kuala Lumpur, 18-22 December 1989) (combined with the Fifth Asian Regional Seminar on the Question of Palestine)

(Fourth) Asian NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(Nicosia, 23-24 January 1992) (combined with the Sixth Asian Regional Seminar on the Question of Palestine)

African regional symposia

(First) African Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(Dakar, 5-7 August 1985)

(Second) African Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(Cairo, 18-22 December 1988) (combined with the Fifth African Regional Seminar on the Question of Palestine)

(Third) African Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(Freetown, 2-6 April 1990) (combined with the Sixth African Regional Seminar on the Question of Palestine)

(Fourth) African Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(Dakar, 30 August-3 September 1993) (combined with the Seventh African Regional Seminar on the Question of Palestine)

European regional symposia

(First) European Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(Vienna, 30 June and 1 July 1986)

(Second) European Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(Geneva, 29 and 30 August 1988)

(Third) European Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(Vienna, 28 and 29 August 1989)

(Fourth) European Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(Geneva, 27 and 28 August 1990)

(Fifth) European Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(Vienna, 26 and 27 August 1991)

(Sixth) European Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(Geneva, 24 and 25 August 1992)

(Seventh) European Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(Vienna, 23 and 24 August 1993)

(Eighth) European Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(Geneva, 29 August-1 September 1994) (combined with the Eleventh International NGO Meeting on the Question of Palestine)

Latin American and Caribbean regional symposia

(First) Latin American and Caribbean Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(Buenos Aires, 5-9 February 1990) (combined with the Fourth Latin American and Caribbean Regional Seminar on the Question of Palestine)

International meetings

First International NGO Meeting on the Question of Palestine
(Geneva, 20-22 August 1984)

Second International NGO Meeting on the Question of Palestine
(Geneva, 9-12 September 1985)

Third International NGO Meeting on the Question of Palestine
(Vienna, 2-4 July 1986)

Fourth International NGO Meeting on the Question of Palestine
(Geneva, 7-9 September 1987)

Fifth International NGO Meeting on the Question of Palestine
(Geneva, 31 August-2 September 1988)

Sixth International NGO Meeting on the Question of Palestine
(Vienna, 30 August-1 September 1989)

Seventh International NGO Meeting on the Question of Palestine
(Geneva, 29-31 August 1990)

Eighth International NGO Meeting on the Question of Palestine
(Vienna, 28-30 August 1991)

Ninth International NGO Meeting on the Question of Palestine
(Geneva, 26-28 August 1992)

Tenth International NGO Meeting on the Question of Palestine
(Vienna, Austria 25-27 August 1993)

Eleventh International NGO Meeting on the Question of Palestine
(Geneva, 29 August-1 September 1994)

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